

City Sleuth Citation Annual awards on the landscape and cityscape

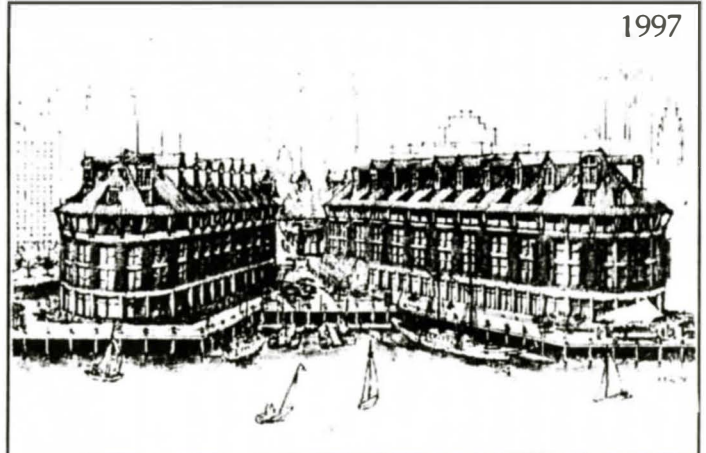
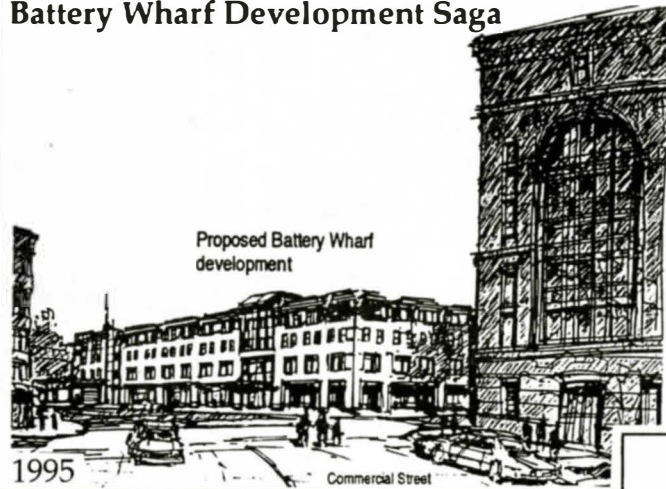
THE BOSTON INFORMER

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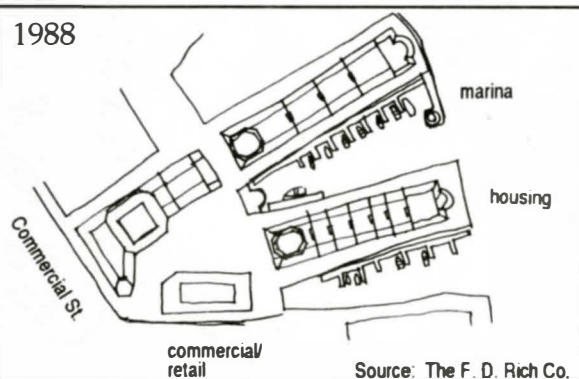
The newsletter for people who care about Boston

May-June 1998

Battery Wharf Development Saga



1988



Developing Battery Wharf...What is now Battery Wharf on the North End waterfront started as a fortification, the "North Battery," built in 1646 on Walter Merry's point with funding from the local residents as protection from marauding armed ships. A "South Battery" was also built close to what is now Rowes Wharf. In 1706, North Battery was lengthened to 120 feet by 40 feet, and when Lord Howe evacuated Boston in 1776 it had 13 guns, all of which he disabled.

In 1789, the Battery was sold by the town to Jeffrey and Russell, and until 1796 was called Jeffrey's Wharf. The name then became Battery Wharf, and it was used as general shipping wharf, particularly for groceries and soap. For the last several decades Battery Wharf has been home to Bay State Lobster for its wholesale and retail seafood operations and other retail operations.

In 1988, the F.D. Rich Co. proposed to develop Battery Wharf by building 470,000 s.f. of residential space with 311 units, 30,000

s.f. of commercial space and underground parking for 475 cars, all in four buildings up to 55 feet in height. The proposal died in the real estate collapse of the late 1980s.

In 1995, the Raymond Co. proposed to build 231 rental apartments in two buildings with 250 underground parking spaces on the water side of the wharf and a two-story retail building with supermarket on the second floor and 100 underground parking spaces on Commercial Street. This proposal was rejected by state agencies and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) because it lacked public accommodations on the water side and violated the Chapter 91 waterways statute.

To remedy this, the BRA proposed putting retail on the ground floor of the waterside piers in spite of the fact that retail had failed miserably on Lewis and Commercial wharves. To overcome these objections, Raymond Co. in 1997 proposed a hotel on the first floor of the pier building and 140 condominiums on the upper floors with the height up to 75 feet.

This revised proposal was approved by the key state environmental agency in March 1998.

However, strong objections arose from various sections of the community, some against the hotel, some against the height and view corridors. There was also opposition to a supermarket in spite of the fact North End residents, many of them older, had for many years identified the need for a supermarket.

In response, Raymond Co. in April 1998 eliminated the supermarket, dropped the height to 55 feet and added more open space. The current \$100 million plan has 198 hotel rooms and 120 condominiums on the pier buildings, 366 underground parking spaces, and retail and restaurant space. This proposal, the fourth development proposal for Battery Wharf since 1988, was given preliminary approval by the BRA Board in May.

Additional approvals are still needed by the Boston Civic Design Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals for conditional uses, and the state Chapter 91 requirements.

People Movers

Bob Albee, from deputy director for construction and mitigation for the Central Artery/Tunnel project, to Vanasse Hangen Brustlin.
Linda McConchie, from Salem Witch Trials Tercentenary, to director of the Freedom Trail Foundation.
Dorri Giles Raposa was named senior vice president at HDR Engineering.
Harron Ellenson, president of Harron and Associates, Back Bay design firm, was recently sworn in as newest Boston Landmarks Commissioner.
Luisa Paiewonsky, current director of planning at Mass. Highway Dept., has been appointed secretary of the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization.
Bernie Goon, from Vollmer Assoc., to Vanasse & Assoc.
Oliver Gillham, principal at Gillham, Gander + Chin architects, has retired to pursuing his writing interests.
Renee Carr, from URS Greiner, to HDR Engineering.
Bob Kelly, from Massport, to ICF Kaiser Inc.
Jerry Pucillo, former head of Boston archdiocese planning and recently with Bovis Construction, to The Rise Group, construction managers.
Kirk Sykes, president of Primary Group architectural firm, was appointed to the Boston Civic Design Commission.
Matthew O'Neil, from staff of Rep. Joseph Kennedy, to chief of staff at the Boston Redevelopment Authority.
Marvin Miller, from Barnes & Jarnis/Pennoni Assoc., to Green International engineers.

1 Boston University's Armory building may soon be developed. Boston University received approval from the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) to proceed with a \$63 million, three-building dormitory for 819 students in 216 units on the 10.2-acre site. The tallest building will be 230 feet (18 stories), and all the buildings will be on the northeasterly side of the Armory. The project is scheduled for completion by August 2000 and will help B.U. to move toward its goal of housing 75 percent of students on-campus, thereby relieving pressure on rental housing in the area.
 B.U. acquired the Commonwealth Armory and adjacent land in 1983 at a below-market price from the City toward the end of Kevin White's tenure as mayor.

2 Extend the **Blue Line to Beverly?** Well, this new MBTA "project" was given preliminary approval by the U.S. House of Representatives. Existing Blue Line service ends in Revere at Wonderland, and the extension would give the North Shore improved access to Logan Airport and downtown Boston (Government Center). Existing commuter rail runs relatively infrequently, does not serve the airport and ends at North Station. Cost estimates for the extension range from \$110 million to \$500 million, and funding is far from certain.
 In the new six-year federal transportation funding bill, \$50 million was earmarked for the Blue Line extension.

3 More change is coming to Downtown Crossing with the **consolidation of selling floors at Macy's**. Macy's will sell its building at 450 Washington St. and lease back three floors for its retail operations in a 20- to 70-year long-term lease. The new owner, the developer of the rehabbed Lafayette Place next to Macy's, will renovate the entire building and create 323,000 s.f. of office space on six floors. Macy's now has seven selling floors including the basement; when the renovation is complete, Macy's will occupy about 400,000 s.f. in the basement, first and second floors.
 The \$60 million project will be called One Summer Street and will begin construction in late 1998. The retail space is expected to be complete for the 1999 Christmas season; office space, spring 2000. Architect: ADD Inc.

4 New England Financial is moving forward with its plan to demolish its **garage at 131 Dartmouth St. next to Back Bay station** and build a \$60 million, 12-story office building with over 350,000 s.f. of office and 4,000 s.f. of "passive" retail space. The project includes over 750 parking spaces in six levels, four below grade, to replace and add to the 491 parking spaces currently on the site.
 The site, at the Back Bay/South End border, three years ago was proposed to be a multi-screen cinema/retail complex. Community review delayed the project and New England Financial withdrew its offer to sell the property.
 The project is currently under review in the city's Article 80 process. Construction is expected to start in the fall of 1998 with demolition of the garage. The project is expected to be complete in early 2001. Architect: Arrowstreet.

5 **Restoration of East India Row** from Atlantic Avenue to Harbor Towers is finally underway. For more than two years of construction for utility relocation for the Central Artery/Tunnel (CA/T) project (contract C14C4), East India Row was completely torn up. It is now one of the first restoration sites for the CA/T project.

The street will have new pavers on the sidewalks and the street itself, granite curbs, new streetlights, planters and trees. The work is being done in phases to allow traffic and deliveries to continue during construction and should be completed by September 1998.

Earlier, the plaza on the harbor between Harbor Towers and the New England Aquarium was rebricked, and the Boston Redevelopment Authority is funding additional work to restore the steps down to the seawall. No date has been given for the CA/T project to replant shrubs and trees and install appropriate pedestrian-scale lighting.



TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century), the new six-year, \$217 billion federal transportation bill replacing ISTEA, was recently signed into law by President Clinton.

TEA-21 authorizes annual expenditures of between \$165 billion and \$178 billion for roads and bridges, \$36 billion to \$41 billion for transit, and \$1.5 billion for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program and the Transportation Enhancements Program.

Massachusetts is the only state to receive less money than it received in the last round. The bill provides Massachusetts with \$525 million to \$536 million per year for highway projects, reduced from \$830 million per year the state has been receiving for the past six and one-half years.

State administration officials have repeatedly stated that the state needs \$630 million per year in federal funding to complete the Central Artery/Tunnel project, leaving the state with a \$100 million per year funding shortfall. Other than ongoing strategies to tap into the federal pot for more money, state officials have been relatively silent about how the state will make up the shortfall (such as increased turnpike and tunnel tolls).



Did You Know??

- the U. S. Coast Guard has put the City on notice that it may start to **impose fines** if the **Old Northern Avenue Bridge** continues to obstruct navigation. The bridge may be demolished unless a private developer can be found to save it and either raise the center span by 10 feet or secure it open to allow boats to pass through.
- **baby haddock are being hatched in incubator tanks** in the Charlestown Navy Yard, under the auspices of MIT, using water from Boston Harbor. The long-term goal is to encourage fish farming around Boston Harbor.
- **revised plans approved for the MBTA's Airport station** eliminate the single-level train/bus platform on the inbound side, assumed for years to help increase in Blue Line ridership to the airport. For most, train-to-shuttle bus transfers will be on one level, but going from shuttle bus to train to downtown will require using stairs up and over the tracks. New studies concluded that Blue Line ridership to the airport is not going to soar because of same-level platforms, so it was not worth pursuing.
- **the Central Artery/Tunnel staff will be moving out of their South Station offices** to the Mass. Highway building on Kneeland Street, which now houses some CA/T staff. The move is possible because of personnel reductions as the design phase of the project ends.

The Central Artery/Tunnel project is developing **over 150 acres of open space** as project mitigation, over and above the 27 acres of open space that will be created when the overhead Central Artery is demolished.

- **Charles River Basin**—approximately 42 acres of parks along the Charles River embankments and near the new Charles River bridges. Some will be completed by 1999, and the remainder after the bridges are built, scheduled for 2002.
- **East Boston**—seven to eight acres will be added to Memorial Stadium Park, planned for 2001, and a new 12-acre Bremen Street Park should also be built by 2001.
- **Fort Point Channel and South Boston**—no new parks are planned, only walkways and plantings.
- **South Bay Interchange**—this entire area will be fully landscaped and could become a park.
- **Spectacle Island**—this Harbor Island will be transformed into a 103-acre park with trails, a beach, pier/marina and visitor center after 1999 when dumping of CA/T dirt has stopped. The park should be complete by 2002.

Anne Fanton of the Central Artery Environmental Oversight Committee provided details for this report.

Welcome to The Boston Informer!

The goal is simple: provide concise public information on construction projects, planning initiatives, and whatever else affects living and working in Boston. Welcome to *The Boston Informer*!

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**Central what? Big what?
That hole wasn't there yesterday!**

You were asking...

- Q. The City finally seemed to be moving forward with plans to widen Merrimac Street in the North Station area and make it two-way, but nothing is happening. How come?**
- A.** After the City worked with abutters and interest groups to come up with an acceptable design for the short street that included wide sidewalks and a minimal median, Mass. Highway, which is funding the project, is delaying the project. In an odd move, Mass. Highway declared that the project requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Report—despite the fact that a two-way Merrimac Street has been assumed in the planning and design of all other area projects, including the Central Artery project!
- Q. I read that planners for the Convention Center assume that on a given day, 11,000 out-of-town conventioners will take shuttle buses from nearby hotels. That's a lot of buses!**
- A.** Yes. Picture 275 shuttle buses arriving in South Boston each morning, mostly from across the Fort Point Channel.
- Q. Why is the MBTA considering extending the Blue Line to Lynn, Salem and Beverly? Is it a good idea?**
- A.** North Shore business and civic interests have been pushing the MBTA for years for transit improvements, but extending the Blue Line may not be the best solution. Almost 75 percent of the projected ridership would be riders shifted from existing transit (commuter rail and bus), making the project expensive for relatively few new riders. In general, rapid transit service, such as the Blue Line, is designed for relatively high-density areas; commuter rail and express buses better serve outlying communities.

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